

LESSON 4: EUROPE — THE PENINSULAR CONTINENT



*Celtic
clans
fjords
geysers
Gulf Stream
Orthodox Church
Slavs*

INTRODUCTION

Some geographers consider Europe and Asia as one continent, Eurasia. It is generally accepted, however, that Europe and Asia are two separate continents, with Europe taking up the vast western peninsula of the European/Asian landmass. The Ural Mountains, Caspian Sea, Caucasus Mountain System, Black Sea, and Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits (Illustration 5.4.1) separate Europe from Asia.

Although Europe, the second smallest continent, is itself a peninsula, it also consists of many peninsulas surrounded by many seas (Illustrations I and J) including:

- The Scandinavian Peninsula, home to Norway and Sweden, between the Norwegian and Baltic Seas
- The Kola Peninsula in Russia on the Barents Sea
- The Jutland Peninsula, home to Denmark and part of Germany, between the North and Baltic Seas
- The Iberian Peninsula, home to Portugal and Spain, west of the Mediterranean Sea and separated from the African continent by the Strait of Gibraltar
- The Italian Peninsula, home to Italy, Vatican City, and San Marino, on the Mediterranean and Adriatic Seas
- The Balkan Peninsula, home to Greece, Bulgaria, European Turkey, Albania, Mace-

donia, Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, and part of Romania, on the Mediterranean, Adriatic, Aegean, and Black Seas

- The Crimean Peninsula, which is part of the Ukraine, on the Black Sea.

Entering the many seas of Europe are major rivers, including the Volga, Danube, Dnieper, and Rhine. The Volga is the longest river in Europe, flowing south through Russia to enter the Caspian Sea. The Danube starts in Germany, flows through or creates borders with eight countries (Austria, Slovak Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine), and enters the Black Sea. Also flowing into the Black Sea is the Dnieper, passing through Russia, Belarus, and the Ukraine. The Rhine River is the main waterway of western Europe. It rises in Switzerland, forms part of the Germany-France border, then flows through the Netherlands to the North Sea.

The source of the Rhine River is the Alps, the principal mountain range of Europe, which passes through Switzerland, France, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, and Yugoslavia. The Alps are part of the Alpine Mountain System that crosses Europe from west to east. Other important mountain ranges in the Alpine Mountain System are the Pyrenees which separate France from Spain and are home to the country of Andorra; the earthquake prone Apennines that extend down the Italian Peninsula; the Carpathians extending from the Czech Republic along the Poland-Slovak Republic border into the Ukraine and Romania; and as previously mentioned, the Caucasus Mountains.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Caspian Sea is not really a sea. It is the largest lake in the world — over 140,000 square miles.

Another important physical feature of Europe is the North European Plain that stretches from the Atlantic coast of France to the Ural Mountains in Russia. The area is a lowland, much of it below 500 feet in elevation. It contains Europe's best farmland, where

the practices of agricultural diversity and high productivity help feed Europe's large population — about 25 percent of the Earth's total population in an area about half the size of the U.S.

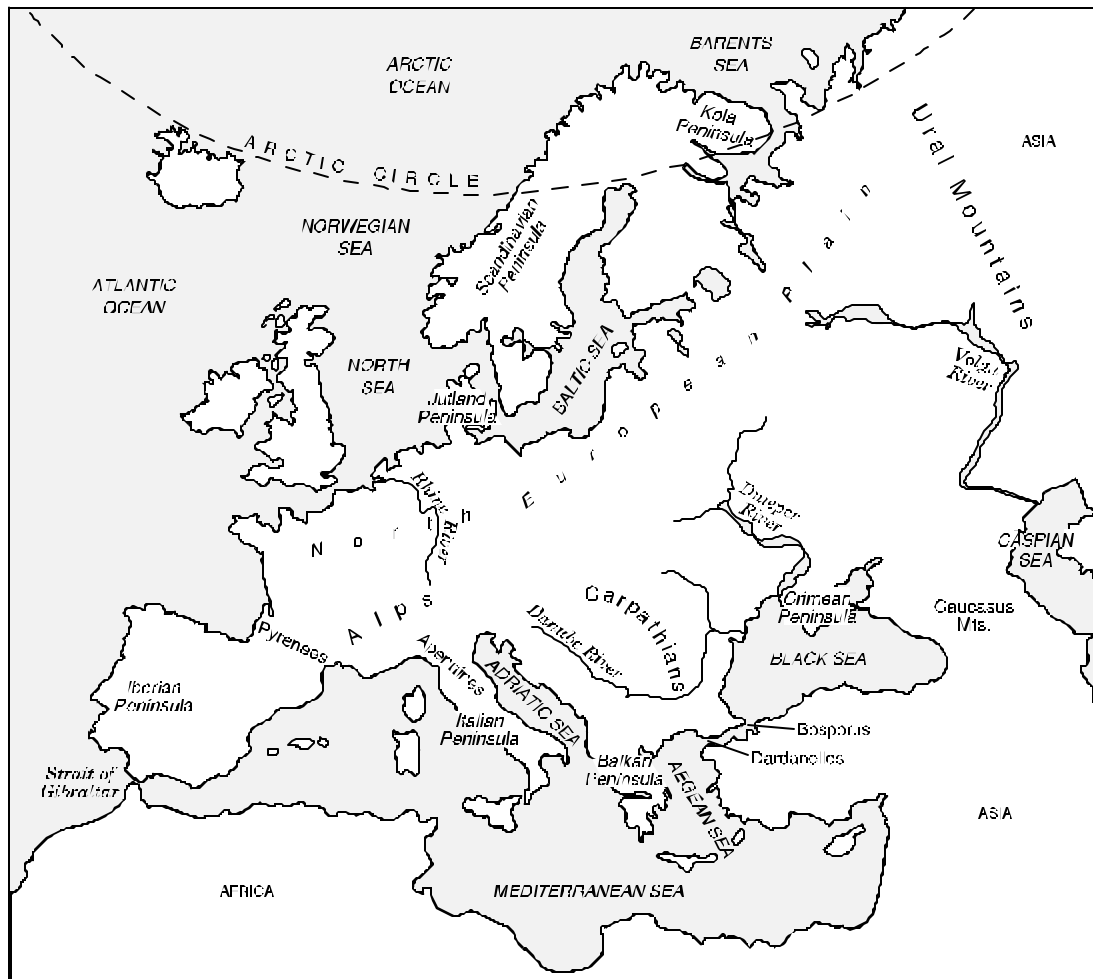


Illustration 5.4.1

People of very different backgrounds and cultures exist together on this small continent, which is home to over 40 different countries. Historically, European countries have been economically and politically fragmented, their borders shaped by conflict and the rise and fall of political powers. Yet, Europe also

has a history rich in science, art, literature, music, religion, commerce, world exploration, and industry. Today, Europe continues to possess thriving cities, excellent transportation networks, high productivity, and innovative technology.

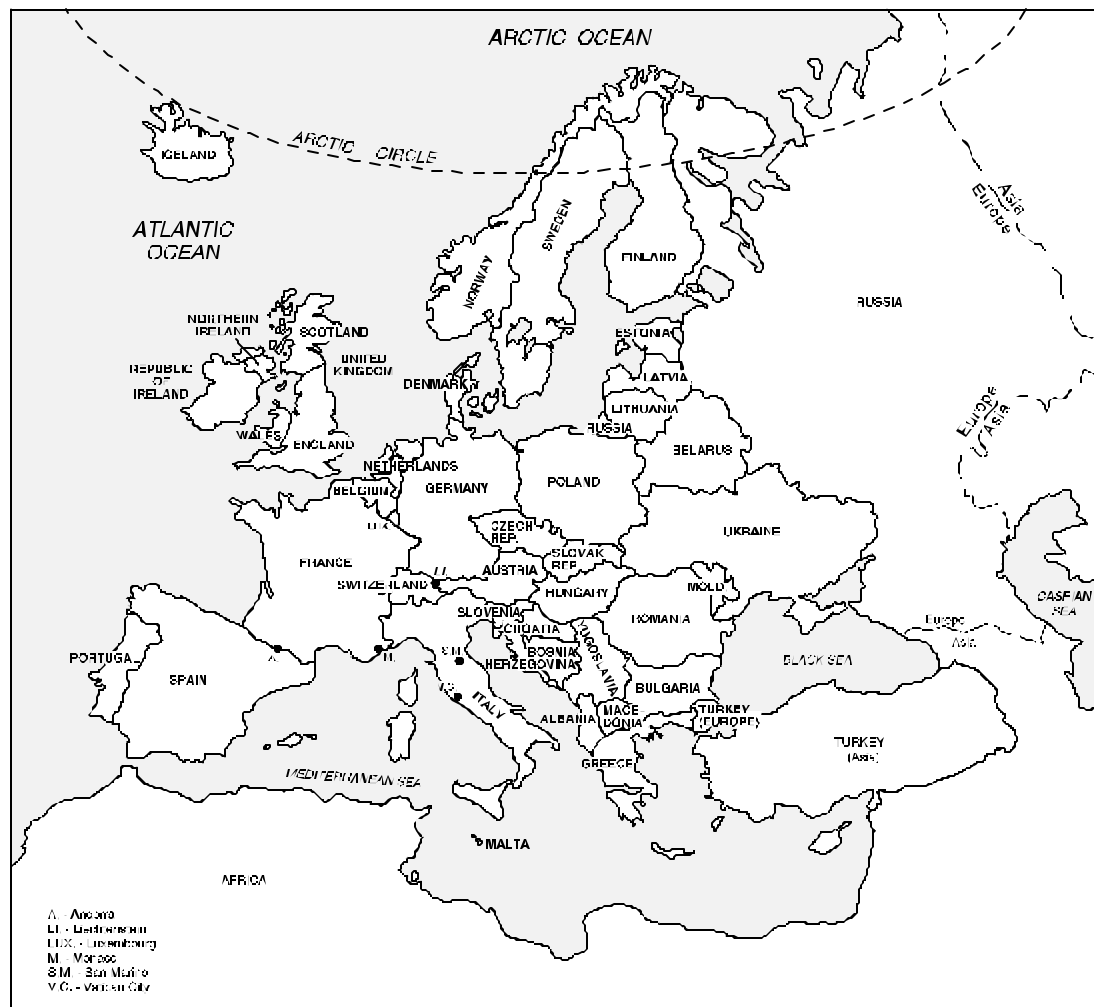


Illustration 5.4.2

In western Europe, 11 countries formed the Economic and Monetary Union, and in the pursuit of economic unity, created one currency, the euro, which was issued in 2001. In contrast, many countries in eastern Europe are struggling with internal conflicts and economic problems following the dissolution in the early 1990s of the U.S.S.R., of which many were a part.

THE BRITISH ISLES: GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

The British Isles (Illustration 5.4.3) are home to the United Kingdom (England, Scot-

land, Northern Ireland, and Wales) and the Republic of Ireland. They consist of two large islands, Great Britain and Ireland, and smaller islands off their coasts. The North Sea and the English Channel, which is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, separate the British Isles from mainland Europe. London, located on the Thames River, is the capital of England and the United Kingdom. The Pennines Mountain Range is "the backbone of England," and the Highlands in Scotland is a mountainous region known for its rugged beauty and distinctive culture based on **clans**. The British Isles tend to have wet weather, with Ireland receiving the heaviest rainfall.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Highlands region has many lochs, or almost landlocked arms of the sea, including Loch Ness, which many people claim contains the “Loch Ness monster.”

IMPORTANT HISTORICAL/POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

From 1801 until 1922, all of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom; however, the Irish, especially the large Catholic population, fought British rule. In the 1920s, Britain divided Ireland — Northern Ireland was mostly Protestant and stayed in union with the United Kingdom, while the rest of Ireland eventually became the Republic of Ireland.

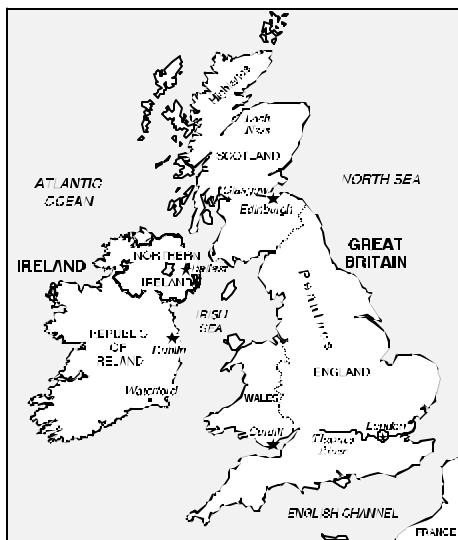


Illustration 5.4.3 — The British Isles

PEOPLE

The United Kingdom is one of the most densely populated nations in Europe. Of the United Kingdom's 57 million people, England has the largest population, with 20 million people living in and around London. In contrast, Ireland has a shrinking population. Each year, 30,000 Irish leave their country, usually because of Ireland's economic problems. Since

1999, however, these problems seem to be on the decline due to Ireland's promotion of new industries, trade, and foreign investments.

The population of the United Kingdom is 81 percent English, 10 percent Scottish, 2 percent Irish, 2 percent Welsh, and 2 percent Asian and African from former British colonies. English is the universal language of the British Isles, with **Celtic** languages (Welsh, Irish Gaelic, and Scots Gaelic) spoken as well.

Like North and South Americans, people from the British Isles are overwhelmingly Christian. In the United Kingdom, a majority of people are Protestant, in contrast to the Republic of Ireland where the majority are Catholic. Since the 1960s, Northern Ireland has experienced violence between Catholics and Protestants based on Catholic claims of discrimination and Protestant fears of reunification with the Republic of Ireland.

ECONOMY

The United Kingdom is a leading industrial nation. Yet, because of its small size, it lacks the raw materials needed for industry, therefore it exports manufactured goods in exchange for the raw materials and food needed for its large population. This makes the United Kingdom one of the most active trading nations in the world. Industries include food processing, publishing, shipbuilding, and production of oil and gas from the North Sea. Other economic activities include agriculture, livestock, fishing, and tourism.

In the Republic of Ireland, agriculture is the primary economic activity, with much of the land used for grazing sheep and cattle. Tourism is also a large source of income. Other economic activities include fishing, forestry, and a recent growth in engineering, electronics, and software development.

WESTERN EUROPE: THE CONTINENTAL CORE

Western Europe (Illustration 5.4.4) consists of Andorra, Austria, Benelux (created when Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg formed a trade union in 1948), France, Germany, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland. Territorially, France is the largest country; Liechtenstein is the smallest comprise of just 62 square miles.

Physically, the region possesses a variety of landscapes. The Alps in France, Switzerland, and Austria contrast with the extremely flat land of Benelux, also referred to as the Low Countries because they lie near sea level. In the Netherlands, more than 25 percent of the land is actually below sea level; the Dutch have claimed land from the sea by connecting coastal islands in the North Sea with dikes, then pumping out the trapped water.

Like the Netherlands and Belgium of Benelux, Germany and France also have coastlines. The rest of the countries in western Europe are landlocked, and rely on rivers connected by canals and artificial waterways.

PEOPLE

Like the United Kingdom, the countries of western Europe are densely populated. Comparing size and population, the countries of Benelux are some of the most densely populated on Earth. Twenty-five million people inhabit an area about the size of the state of Maine. Maine, by comparison, contains only 1.2 million people.

Like the British Isles, a majority of people are Christian. Unlike the British Isles, the countries of western Europe do not share a common language. In the Netherlands, Dutch is the official language. In Germany, Austria, and Liechtenstein, a majority of the people speak

German. In Luxembourg, both German and French are official languages, although the common language is Luxembourgish, a form of German. In Switzerland, German, French, and Italian are spoken. French is the official language of France.

In Belgium, more than half of its people are Flemings, natives of Flanders who speak Flemish, a Dutch language; while a third are Walloons, inhabitants of southern Belgium who speak French. Political tensions between the Flemings and Walloons caused the collapse of several governments; and in 1989, a new constitution split Belgium into three regions: Flanders, Wallonia, and the bilingual city of Brussels.

ECONOMY

Industry and commerce make western Europe the continental core. Many internationally important cities in the region include Brussels, Belgium, which is headquarters of the European Union and NATO; Geneva, Switzerland, which is headquarters to over 200 international organizations, including the International Red Cross and the World Health Organization; Paris, France, one of the world's main tourist destinations and a world center of art, high fashion, and luxury goods; and Rotterdam in the Netherlands, which is one of the largest ports in the world.

Switzerland, with a history of political stability and neutrality, strong commerce, and technological advancement, is one of the richest countries in the world. It is famous for cheese, chocolate, watches, and banking. Luxembourg is another important banking center. Belgium is one of Europe's most heavily industrialized nations. In addition to industry, the Netherlands boasts a large agricultural base.

France, however, is Europe's leading agricultural producer. Although wheat is its

major crop, the country has enormous agricultural diversity, and French wine and cheese are world-famous. France also specializes in high-quality textiles and precision equipment. It is active in the telecommunications, biotechnology, and aerospace industries.

In Germany, a division exists between the economies of old East and West Germany

(separated by a Soviet blockade in 1949 and reunited following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989). Because of the east's previous socialist economy, it has limited industrial development compared to the west. Despite these problems, Germany has a strong economy. It exports high-technology goods and among its most famous exports are its automobiles, which include BMW, Mercedes, Porsche, and Volkswagen.

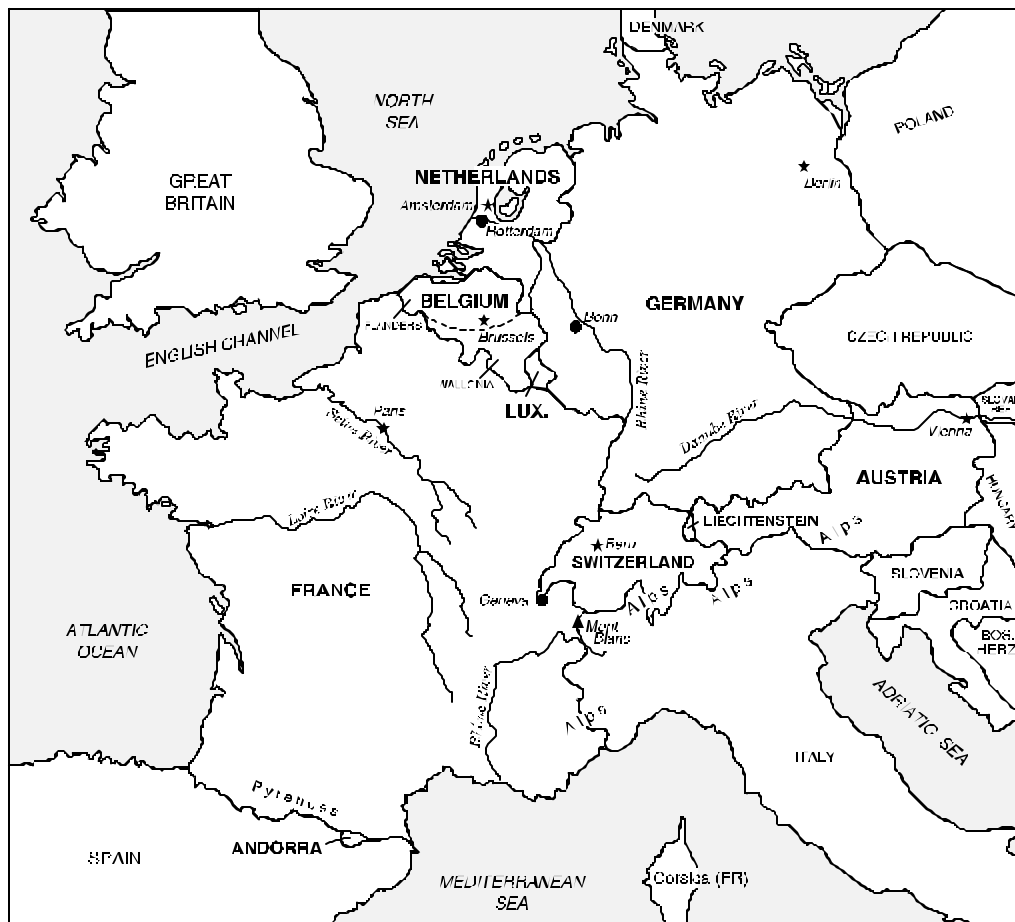


Illustration 5.4.4 — Western Europe

SCANDINAVIA: THE NORTHERNMOST COUNTRIES

For historical, ethnic, and geographical reasons, Scandinavia (Illustration 5.4.5) consists of Norway and Sweden on the Scandinavian Peninsula, as well as Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. These are the world's northernmost countries. The U.S., Canada, and Russia all have territory at similar latitudes, but they also possess more southerly land.

Norway's coastline is irregular with many islands and **fjords**. Its interior is mountainous, with much of it over 5,000 feet in elevation. The Kjölen Mountains in the north form a border with Sweden. Forest covers over half of Sweden and Finland, and both countries have much inland water in the forms of rivers and lakes. Unlike Norway and Sweden, Finland and Denmark are low-lying countries. Iceland has snowfields and glaciers as well as active volcanoes, hot springs, and **geysers**. Underground hot water heats many towns in Iceland, and warm water from the **Gulf Stream** flows around the country keeping its ports ice-free.

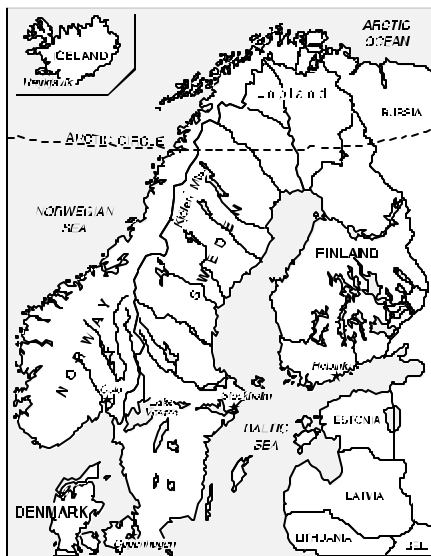


Illustration 5.4.5 — Scandinavia

PEOPLE

For its size, Scandinavia has a small population with most people living in the southern portion of the region. People from Scandinavian countries have much in common. Most have a high standard of living; and not only are a majority Protestant, over 90 percent of all Scandinavians are specifically Lutheran. Each country has its own language, yet Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian are mutually understandable. These three languages and Icelandic are of German origin. Only Finnish is totally different, but many Finns also speak Swedish.

In the Arctic region of Scandinavia, known as Lapland, there is a Lapp minority believed to have originated in central Asia. The Lapps use the reindeer as a pack animal as well as, for milk, meat, leather.

ECONOMY

Denmark's level land and good soil support intensive agriculture. Estimates indicate its farm production could feed 20 million people a year. Since Denmark has few natural resources, it trades exports for raw materials to support processing industries. One famous Denmark product is Lego toy building blocks. Unlike Denmark, only three percent of Norway's land is under cultivation, and one of its important economic activities is the extraction and processing of raw materials including North Sea oil. Both its fishing industry and its merchant marine are among the world's largest. Similarly, three-fourths of Iceland's income comes from fishing.

Chief exports of both Finland and Sweden are wood products. Both have shifted from traditional economic activities of farming and forestry to industries like electronics, food processing, and chemical manufacturing. Bordering Russia, Finland has experienced

economic problems due to changes in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe in the 1990s.

MEDITERRANEAN EUROPE: PENINSULAS AND ISLANDS

Greece, Italy, Malta, Monaco, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, and Vatican City make up Mediterranean Europe (Illustration 5.4.6). Like Scandinavia, this region consists of many peninsulas and islands. In addition to the Iberian and Italian Peninsulas (recall Illustration 5.4.1), the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula is a peninsular region of Greece known as the Peloponnese. Over 1,400 islands

make up 20 percent of Greece, with Crete being the largest.

Most of Mediterranean Europe is mountainous or hilly. As in western Europe, the Alps and Pyrenees Mountains are important physical features of this region. Other features include the Apennine Mountains that run through Italy and are home to San Marino, a 23 square mile republic land-locked in Italy; the 2.5 square mile city of Gibraltar on the Strait of Gibraltar, which the United Kingdom owns and Spain wants; the Italian city of Venice, built on 118 islets in a lagoon, allowing transportation by boat only through a system of canals; and the rivers Tagus, Ebro, Po, and Tiber.

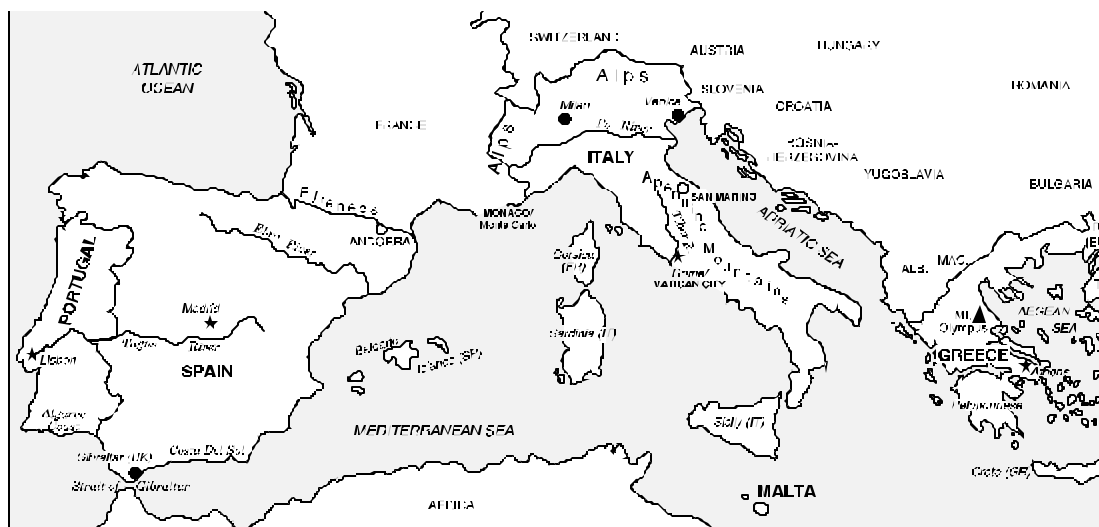


Illustration 5.4.6 — Mediterranean Europe

The Tiber River flows through Rome, Italy, an important historical and cultural city for more than 2,000 years. Located in Rome on the Tiber is Vatican City, the smallest independent nation in the world at less than one-fifth of a square mile. Often called simply the Vatican, it is the world center of the Catholic Church and home of the pope, who is its spiritual leader. Although the Vatican is small,

decisions made there by the pope often affect politics in other predominantly Catholic countries. His influence is particularly great with laws on moral issues.

PEOPLE

In general, the people of Mediterranean Europe have a lower standard of living than

their neighbors in western Europe, Scandinavia, and the British Isles. Monaco, a luxury resort area that is home to many wealthy people, is an exception. Of the larger Mediterranean countries, Portugal and Greece have the lowest standards of living. Although its island of Sicily still has much poverty, Italy, in general, has the highest standard of living in the region.

Whereas Spain has the largest territory, Italy has the largest population at 57 million — almost equal to Portugal, Spain, and Greece combined. Yet, the smaller countries are the most crowded, especially Malta. Except for the Greeks, most of whom belong to the **Orthodox Church**, the majority of people in Mediterranean Europe are Roman Catholic.

Like western Europe, languages in Mediterranean Europe differ from country to country: Greek in Greece; Portuguese in Portugal; Italian in Italy and San Marino; English and Maltese (a mixture of Arabic and Italian) in Malta; and French in Monaco. Latin, an ancient language from which the Romance languages evolved, is the official language in Vatican City. In Spain, Spanish is the official language, but other dialects and languages spoken are Catalan and Basque.

The Basques, located in north Spain and southwest France, are probably Europe's oldest ethnic group. The majority live in Spain and preserve their unique traditions and ancient language, unrelated to any present-day European language. Many Basques desire political independence, and some engage in terrorism to force the establishment of a Basque state.

ECONOMY

The warm climate in Mediterranean Europe makes tourism an important economic activity, while dry summers and rocky soil make agriculture difficult in many areas. The

region lags behind much of western Europe in industrial development.

Greek islands and ancient structures still standing in Athens make Greece a major tourist attraction, with the service sector accounting for almost 60 percent of Greek income. Other industries include shipping (Greece's maritime fleet is one of the largest in Europe), textiles, food processing, and chemicals. Agricultural exports include grapes, olives, and olive oil. Olives and grapes are also the main crops in Spain where industry supplements a traditionally agricultural economy. Since the late 1980s, Spain's economy has grown at a fast rate. High-technology industries, resorts, and retirement communities have multiplied, especially along the Mediterranean coast.

Exports of Portugal include textiles, shoes, leather, and wood products from the large forests covering 20 percent of the country. Tourism is important, especially in the south on the Algarve Coast. Tourism is a major economic activity in Monaco, known for its beautiful location, mild climate, and world-famous gambling casinos in Monte Carlo.

In northern Italy, agriculture and industry prosper. The area around the Po River valley is a major agricultural region, and fruit, nuts, and grapes grow in the foothills of the Alps. Milan is the leading manufacturing center in Mediterranean Europe. Its factories are world-famous for their efficiency and speed. Known for its fashion and footwear, Italy produces machinery, automobiles, and textiles.

EASTERN EUROPE: IN TRANSITION

Political instability, changing boundaries, and internal ethnic and religious problems mark the countries of eastern Europe. Although not all of these countries were part of the U.S.S.R., communist parties and communist economics controlled this region for much of

the twentieth century. With the collapse of the Soviet-dominated communist system in the late 1980s and early 1990s, many problems surfaced as countries declared their independence and struggles for political control and economic reform began. At the turn of the century, eastern Europe remains an area in transition.

EUROPEAN RUSSIA

In its entirety, Russia is the largest country in the world, stretching more than six million square miles from eastern Europe across northern Asia to the Pacific. European Russia (Illustration 5.4.7) is Russia's core area with major industry and transportation networks, well-cultivated land, and a large portion of Russia's population. This area also has many large cities including Moscow, Russia's capital and largest city, and St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad), a Baltic port and Russia's second largest city.

Except for the Caucasus and Ural Mountains, most of European Russia is flatland consisting of the fertile Russian Plain (part of the North European Plain) and drained by the Volga and Don Rivers.

People

After years of living under restrictive and repressive government regulations, the Russian people witnessed a move in the late 1980s toward greater cultural freedom, freedom of the press, and open public debate. This move was part of the policy of *glasnost*, or openness of information, that affected not only Russia but the rest of eastern Europe as well.



Illustration 5.4.7 — European

Russians make up part of Europe's largest ethnic group, the **Slavs**. Over 80 percent of Russia's total population is Russian with over 100 other ethnic groups making up the rest. Russian, a Slavic language, is official, with over 100 other languages spoken as well. Many people are non-religious, but 25 percent consider themselves Orthodox. There is also a Muslim minority.

Economy

Since the late 1980s, Russia has restructured its communist economy in a move toward capitalism. Currently it is struggling with legal problems related to private property, food and fuel shortages, unemployment, and cutback or suspension of social services. European Russia has a wealth of mineral resources in the Ural Mountains as well as oil and natural gas along the Volga River. The greatest industrial regions are around Moscow and along the Volga. Fruit and tobacco are major export crops.

THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

The remaining northern countries in eastern Europe include Belarus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and the Ukraine (Illustration 5.4.8). The lands of Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland are covered in part by the North European Plain, while the Carpathian Mountains begin in the Czech Republic and extend through southern Poland and the Slovak Republic.

People

The majority of the populations of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland are Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, and Polish, respectively. The populations of the remaining countries are a diverse mix of ethnic groups. (**Note:** Through the rest of this unit, names of ethnic groups and languages discussed are numerous and may be more unfamiliar to you than those covered previously. The point is not that you must specifically know the names of each region's ethnic groups and languages, but that you gain an appreciation for the diversity of people living in the different regions discussed.)

The Belorussians, Czechoslovakians, Poles, Slovaks, and Ukrainians are of Slavic origin, like the Russians. Likewise, the official languages of these countries (Belorussian, Czechoslovakian, Polish, Slovak, and Ukrainian, respectively) are Slavic languages like Russian. The Hungarians (or Magyars) and the Hungarian language (or Magyar) are of Asian origin. The Moldovans and the Moldovan language are essentially Romanian, since the Soviets took Moldova from Romania in the 1940s. Latvian and Lithuanian are related languages, while the Estonians and their language bear similarities to their neighbors, the Finns. Most people in this region are

Christian (a mix of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox).

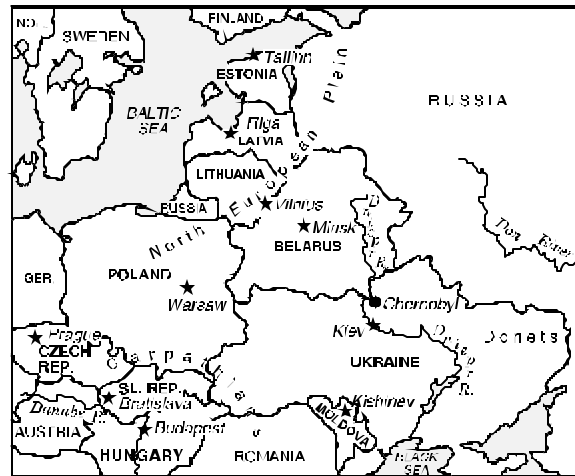


Illustration 5.4.8 - Eastern Europe

Economy

Under communist rule, much of the agriculture and industry in this region came under government control. However, in Hungary in the 1960s, individual farms and factories gained greater independence. This mix of capitalism and communism allowed the Hungarian economy to progress. Much of Hungary is flat farmland, and its industries include engineering, chemicals, textiles, food processing, and mining.

Much of Poland is also flat farmland, and over 50 percent of it is under cultivation. Poland is a major producer of coal and has huge shipbuilding factories. The Ukraine contains the 10,000 square mile Donets coalfield and has been in heavy industry since the late 1800s. It has a wide variety of natural resources, but limited water resources. With its fertile soils, the Ukraine is a major exporter of grain.

Forty-six percent of Belarus is farmland, and Moldova has fertile soils that produce grapes for wine. The Czech Republic has coal and iron, while the Slovak Republic is

more of an agricultural region. Both produce steel; however, since the division of Czechoslovakia, heavy industry in the Slovak Republic has suffered due to loss of state subsidies. The economy of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) relies on manufacturing, agriculture, livestock, and fishing.

THE SOUTHERN COUNTRIES

The remaining countries in eastern Europe lie entirely or partially on the Balkan Peninsula. Often referred to as the Balkan States, they include Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, European Turkey, and Yugoslavia (Illustration 5.4.9). (**Note:** Turkey will be discussed in its entirety in the lesson about Asia.) Except for land near the Danube River, most of this region is mountainous. It contains the Dinaric Alps which are part of the Alpine Mountain System; Balkan Mountains; and Carpathian Mountains which include the Transylvanian Alps in Romania. All but Macedonia, which is landlocked, have coastlines on the Adriatic or Black Seas.

Important Historical/Political Considerations

This region is the most troubled in Europe. In fact, because of the Balkan States' reputation for division and fragmentation, the term "balkanize" means "to break into small and often hostile units." As late as the 1990s, civil war occurred when the former Yugoslav Republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, and Slovenia declared their independence leaving Yugoslavia with only Serbia and Montenegro. Fighting occurred between ethnic and religious groups in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. NATO conducted bombing raids against Serbian forces in Serbia to halt hostilities against ethnic Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo.

People

Like the northern countries of eastern Europe, the southern countries have a mix of ethnic groups (Albanian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Slovene, Slavic, Serbian, Croatian, and Turkish) and languages (Albanian, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Romanian, and Slovene). Unlike their northern counterparts that have mainly Christian populations, many of the southern countries have a mix of Christians (Orthodox and Roman Catholic) and Muslims.

Economy

This region is one of the poorest parts of Europe, with Albania being the poorest country in Europe despite its rich mineral resources. Albania is attempting industrial expansion especially in oil, mining, chemicals, and natural gas. Bulgaria is less industrial than other countries in this region. Much of its land, collectivized in the 1950s, is being returned to former owners or privatized. The state owns a third of the farm land in Romania, which moved from agriculture to industry after World War II.

Yugoslavia's industry has also grown since World War II. The country has natural resources like copper, coal, and timber, as well as fertile valleys for agriculture. However, its economy and the economies of its former republics, have been badly affected by civil war.



Illustration 5.4.9 — Eastern Europe — The South